

Wilson, George Wood ^[1]

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by [Louis Round Wilson](#) ^[2], 1996

7 Apr. 1867–1 June 1930

See also: [Wilson, Edwin Mood](#) ^[3]

George Wood Wilson, attorney and judicial officer, was born at Lenoir, the son of Jethro Reuben and Louisa Jane Round Wilson. A strong, vigorous child, he spent his early years in his home and attended the local schools, including Finley High School and [Davenport College](#) ^[4]. Following the example of his father, he taught in a county school. He frequently recalled with a chuckle an incident that occurred in a meeting of county teachers in which an eccentric teacher became annoyed with him because of his alertness and accuracy in answering a question that the teacher had badly missed. Smarting because of his discomfiture, the older instructor sharply remarked, "Young man, I have forgotten more than you know or ever will know."

After teaching he was employed by M. M. Courtney of Lenoir as a salesman in a general store for some time, and in 1883 he entered [New Garden Boarding School](#) ^[5] for a year during which he had the measles. Not knowing that he should avoid using his eyes until he was well recovered, he continued his studies with the result that he injured his eyes and had to begin wearing glasses.

In 1884 he became a rodman on the Lenoir end of the Chester and Lenoir railroad, which was completed in 1885. When the first train entered the town, he, his father, and his three brothers were aboard. This job finished, he became a salesman in a general store in Morganton, operated by Claywell Brothers, where he remained until 1898.

At Morganton he became acquainted with a community that, unlike Presbyterian-Methodist-dominated Lenoir, was influenced largely by [Episcopalians](#) ^[6]. However, although he became familiar with the phraseology and liturgy of the *Book of Common Prayer* and had friends among the younger set who danced, he acquired some of the different and more liberal attitudes of the community. More important for the future, he likewise became acquainted with the political life of the area and with the career of his great-uncle [Joseph Wilson](#) ^[7], a resident of Charlotte, who a generation earlier had become a distinguished district attorney for a large part of western North Carolina. In one of his most famous trials Joseph secured the conviction of a number of [Burke County](#) ^[8] residents who had shortchanged the federal government in minting gold dollars in the branch U.S. Mint at Charlotte. Joseph Wilson and George's grandfather had studied law under [Reuben Wood](#) ^[9], of Asheboro, who had been a member of the [North Carolina General Assembly](#) ^[10].

In 1888 George returned to New Garden Boarding School and entered the junior class, joining his brother [Edwin Mood](#) ^[3], also a junior. Both men received an A.B. degree from [Guilford College](#) ^[5] the first year after it was granted college status. In the next two years George read and studied extensively, took part in the activities of the debating society, and gained experience as a public speaker.

From 1892 to 1898 he was employed by the Holt, Gant, and Holt Manufacturing Company, at Altamahaw, N.C., which operated a large [cotton mill](#) ^[11] and general store. In that position he assumed responsibility for visiting northern markets as buyer and director of the store. He also became acquainted with the methods of operating and financing a [textile plant](#) ^[12]. In 1898 he entered the law school of Columbia University and studied diligently for two years. In August 1900 he passed the North Carolina bar examination in Raleigh and received a license to practice in the state. Returning to Columbia in September, he completed his course and was awarded an LL.B. degree in June 1901.

After considering various places in which to work, he selected Gastonia. In this decision he was assisted by Judge [W. A. Hoke](#) ^[13], a kinsman and descendant of Joseph Wilson. He was also influenced by the rapid industrial growth of Gastonia and the opportunities it offered for advancement. Thaddeus A. Adams, a Charlotte attorney who was designated as the memorialist of the Mecklenburg bar to prepare a sketch of George's life following his death, wrote that Wilson was by his inheritance a student and a thinker, which caused him to forsake the apparently certain profits or fortune of the industrial world and to devote himself to the legal profession.

Active in politics, and having a keen sense of civic pride, he served as mayor of Gastonia in 1903 and 1904. In 1910 he became solicitor of the old Twelfth Judicial District (later the Fourteenth District), serving continuously with distinction until he resigned in 1922 to return to private practice. In 1930 he moved his law office to [Charlotte](#) ^[14], where he remained until appointed in 1933 assistant chief counsel of the old [Prohibition](#) ^[15] (later the Taxes and Penalties) unit of the U.S. Department of Justice, a post he held until his untimely death from a heart attack. The position frequently took him out of Washington to various district and circuit federal courts in which he was admitted to practice. He was also a member of the U.S. Supreme Court Bar.

On 2 Jan. 1907 Wilson married Osie Shuford, a teacher in Gastonia. He was survived by his wife and two children,

George Wood, Jr., a graduate of The University of North Carolina^[16], and Louisa, a graduate of Randolph Macon Womans College^[17], both of whom received law degrees from George Washington Law School. He was also survived by his mother and his brothers E. W. Wilson of the Haverford School, Professor Robert N. Wilson of Duke University, and Dr. Louis R. Wilson^[2] of The University of North Carolina.

A member of the Methodist church^[18], Wilson served as secretary of the Board of Stewards in Gastonia as well as in the Hawthorne Lane church in Charlotte and the Mount Vernon Place church in Washington, D.C. He was buried in Gastonia.

References:

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